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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

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March 18, 2008

Honorable Stephen Johnson, Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington DC 20460

Dear Administrator Johnson:

As you know, a recent investigation by Associated Press (AP) found that "a vast array of pharmaceuticals including antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers and sex hormones" are found in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans in 24 cities, at levels in the parts per billion or parts per trillion range. According to the review, cities all over the United States including in California and New Jersey, were affected.


In addition, as you are aware, the U.S. Geological Survey has been testing for drugs and personal care products in our water resources, and has found widespread contamination with these chemicals at levels similar to those that AP reported.

EPA's website acknowledges that "the major concerns have been the resistance to antibiotics and disruption of aquatic endocrine systems (the system of glands that produce hormones that help control the body's metabolic activity) by natural and synthetic sex steroids...." The website also says there "are no known human health effects from such low-level exposures in drinking water, but special scenarios (one example being fetal exposure to low levels of medications that a mother would ordinarily be avoiding) require more investigation." EPA has further noted that "in addition to antibiotics and steroids, over 100 individual [pharmaceuticals and personal care products] have been identified (as of 2007) in environmental samples and drinking water."

EPA must take all necessary steps to protect the health of America's children and families from these risks. We understand that you have numerous authorities available to pursue this issue. Please provide to us, no later than April 4, 2008, a detailed summary of EPA's plans to respond to the issue of pharmaceuticals and personal care products in our water resources and drinking water. Specifically, what are EPA's plans for gathering existing data, conducting research, monitoring and requiring public disclosure of levels of these chemicals in water, setting standards for these chemicals, reducing inappropriate disposal of these chemicals, and testing and addressing treatment of sewage and sludge for these chemicals? We appreciate your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions, please contact Erik Olson of the Committee staff (202-224-8832; erik_olson@epw.senate.gov), or Arvin Ganesan of Senator Lautenberg's staff (202-224-3224; arvin_ganesan@lautenberg.senate.gov).

Sincerely,


Barbara Boxer
Chairman


Frank R. Lautenberg
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Transportation Safety, Infrastructure
Security, and Water Quality